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News Release

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VA CHIEF CALLS FOR BETTER COMMUNICATION

"Our mutual success on behalf of America's veterans is dependent on open and honest communications," the Administrator of Veterans Affairs has told the American Legion.

Harry N. Walters, chief of the Veterans Administration, expressed this feeling in a letter to Legion National Commander Keith A. Kreul, responding to a Legion news release August 31, criticizing the VA for news reports on an Agent Orange "study."

The news reports which concerned the Legion dealt with statements attributed to Dr. Alvin Young of the VA at a news conference during the national meeting of the American Chemical Society in Washington in late August.

News reports indicated that "a major Agent Orange study" had found no unusual rates of illness among Vietnam veterans who may have been exposed to the chemical defoliant or to its toxic contaminant, dioxin.

Young had stated that medical examinations and laboratory tests of Vietnam veterans who fear they may have been exposed to Agent Orange have revealed no adverse effect directly related to the defoliant or dioxin. "There were a wide variety of health problems but they were of the sort that one sees in a population of males growing older," he said.

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Dr. Young stressed at the time that it was not a scientifically conducted epidemiologic study, and that it was solely an assessment of data in the VA's Agent Orange Registry.

Young explained that the Registry contains names and medical information on 85,000 Vietnam veterans who have been examined by VA medical facilities because of concerns about the possible effects of Agent Orange.

Dr. Young pointed out during the news conference that participants in the Agent Orange Registry Program represent a self-selected population and that while each veteran receives a careful medical examination, it is not intended to determine cause and effect relationships.

The Registry, however, can be used as a tool to see whether unusual disease patterns are being reported within the total population of the Registry, Dr. Young said.

Administrator Walters assured the Legion that the VA remains committed to a careful and scientifically valid evaluation of the whole issue of Agent Orange.

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